



**Fiscal Year 2017 Budget Hearing Testimony**  
**April 12, 2016**

Good morning, Chairman Grosso, members of the Council's Committee on Education and of the public. My name is Jack Jacobson and I am the President of the District of Columbia State Board of Education. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in regards to the Fiscal Year 2017 budget of the State Board of Education, the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education, and the Office of the Student Advocate. The Ombudsman and Student Advocate have prepared their own testimony that will provide additional details about their offices.

The mission of the State Board of Education is to provide policy leadership, support, advocacy, and oversight of public education to ensure that every student is valued and is able to gain the skills and knowledge necessary to become informed, competent, and contributing global citizens. We are the only elected body in the District of Columbia that has a specific focus on a single issue, education. The State Board provides the citizens of this amazing city with a direct voice into education policy development, and we are very proud to be involved.

The State Board plays a critical role in the District's education governance system. As you noted at our performance oversight hearing a few weeks ago, Mr. Chairman, the State Board has become an agency focused on delivering efficient and effective benefits to the residents of the District. The State Board committed itself to deepening and broadening its relationships with other District agencies, such as the Deputy Mayor for Education, the State Superintendent, the Public Charter School Board, and DC Public Schools. By doing so we have all gained new perspectives and included more voices in the decision making process.

These relationships have enabled the Board to have one of its most productive years in recent memory. We worked with OSSE and the adult education community to create the State Diploma, which should have a positive impact on many of our residents striving for a pathway to the middle class. We worked with a diverse set of stakeholders across sectors to create avenues for flexibility in how high school students are able to earn credit for their knowledge and mastery of standards. And soon we will be voting on new health education standards that were developed with input from students, teachers, and practitioners from all across the city.

That is why, Mr. Chairman, I am frustrated by the budget submitted by the Administration. As an independent agency, the State Board should not be subject to competing for funding with the Administration's policy priorities. In fact, the State Board of Education Establishment Act of 2007 specifically precludes this from happening. Unfortunately, those provisions were not followed, leaving an unacceptable hole of over 15% in our agency's budget. Our ask of the Committee and the Council is simple- restore our budget to the full amount in our need for appropriations so that we can do our job, including meeting the mandatory requirements of the Language Access Act.



## Targeted Outcomes

The State Board provides the residents of the District of Columbia with direct access to education policy development and to conflict-resolution services and training not offered by any other District agency.

As you know, the State Board is composed of three offices: the SBOE, Ombudsman and Student Advocate. Each has its own role and duties, but all three work together to ensure our mission to promote equity and achievement is realized in every school.

The State Board has an ambitious year ahead of it. In partnership with OSSE, we will develop the state-level implementation plan of the recently passed Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). In addition to this, we will revise our city's high school graduation requirements. We are also undertaking a broad effort to include more voices at the education decision-making table, a priority I know you also find extremely important. We will intensify our efforts to reach out to the families of our most vulnerable and marginalized students, ideally employing innovative in-person and technological outreach tactics. But this effort will not be possible with the Administration's budget mark.

## ESSA

Under ESSA, the District has much greater flexibility in assessing school performance. This is a watershed moment where we need to think thoughtfully about what we believe constitutes a successful school in Washington, D.C. One of my colleagues has likened this to a moon-landing event in public education. Hyperbole aside, I do want to stress the vital nature and role of the State Board over the next few years in implementing ESSA. The State Board will be engaging with the community on these large questions, and working diligently with OSSE to develop an accountability plan that will encourage positive changes in our education system. This work will include determining what schools will be measured on, how to weight each measure, and how to effectively support low-performing schools. I must be clear, to create a State Plan under ESSA with meaningful feedback from the community will be a substantial lift, but the SBOE is excited to be a partner in this work.

In order to ensure that the State Board has the appropriate authority to continue its role in school accountability under ESSA, we will need to adjust our enabling statutes. The code currently makes numerous references to No Child Left Behind, the previous reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, and the statute needs to be updated to reflect the new law. We look forward to working with you, Mr. Chairman, on those adjustments.

## Graduation Requirements

The District has some of the most stringent and defined graduation requirements in the country. Our graduation rates remain abysmally low, with only 61 percent of our students graduating in four years. We need to take a critical eye to our requirements and make sure that they are fair to



our students while remaining rigorous and ensuring that students graduate with the skills to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

In the coming months, the SBOE will be hosting town halls, participating in community meetings, and doing research on best practices so that we may make an informed decision and provide our students and schools with fair and high quality requirements. We look forward to working closely with OSSE on this throughout the year.

### **Diverse Voices**

One of the hardest parts of being an effective elected official is reaching and truly listening to the most vulnerable and underrepresented residents of our city. These voices represent the majority of the students in our school system, but they are the voices we hear from least. When you look at the stunning gap in academic test scores between our most and least advantaged students, and compare that with the voices most influencing our policy choices, two things become clear. First, that what we are trying in education is not helping at-risk students or isn't working fast or broadly enough. Secondly, that in creating solutions, we need to do more to solicit ideas and advice from those most impacted by the problem we seek to address.

There is no shortcut to accomplishing this. It takes relationship-building and innovative outreach. As elected representatives with a mandate to influence the District's education policy, we must have the personnel resources to do this important work. We want to prevent the need for families to reach out to the Ombudsman because they have been involved in the decisions that affect their lives. The Ombudsman should be a last resort and used in rare and unusual cases. Many times, politicians only have time for the loudest or most repetitive voice. We are lucky in the District to have a population of very active and very involved residents and we are very grateful for their efforts. The State Board will be working this year in a concerted effort to bring new and more diverse voices to the table, including disconnected youth and working parents. We owe it to our constituents to seek them where they are, and find out how we can help make the District's education system better.

### **Fiscal Year 2017 Proposed Budget**

In fiscal year 2017, the State Board of Education estimates that a total need of appropriations of \$1,449,814 are necessary for its operation and the operation of all three of its offices. This total need is based on a true and accurate review of the agency's establishing statutes, legal requirements, and the experience of the agency.

The proposed budget represents a shortfall of over \$200,000 from the State Board's submission in January. As noted in the letter I sent to the Council earlier this month, the State Board is bound by law to provide the Administration with its need for appropriations, which is to be submitted directly to the Council, without change, as part of the budget submission. This provision in the State Board's statute is instrumental in protecting it from unrelated political or policy decisions. The Administration utilized an inaccurate Current Services Funding Level (CSFL) projection that does not reflect the true cost of operating the agency. As you know, the



CSFL is a representation of the Local funds cost of operating District agencies without the consideration of any new policy decisions. The CSFL only took into account what was currently in place, not the fact that what was in place was already below the resources needed to fulfill our mandates. In the future, we would ask to be consulted by the Administration and Chief Financial Officer prior to the release of the budget to prevent these errors.

Mr. Chairman, small agencies like the State Board are particularly sensitive to even small reductions in their budget. For instance, the 3 percent cost-of-living adjustments increase in October, appropriately increasing our staff members' salaries to keep pace with inflation, caused an enormous hole in our non-personnel services funds in fiscal year 2016 because no additional funds were provided to cover these costs. In fact, the CSFL noted these shortfalls and, according to the proposed budget, the majority of the "increases" were actually provided to help meet the costs of the next COLA increase. However, the holes from having to squeeze to meet these increases year-after-year still exist.

In practical terms, we do not have the ability to provide services like Language Access, a waiting list for services from the Ombudsman and student advocate keeps growing and, Mr. Chairman, it means that the State Board cannot keep pace with education reforms that are so needed in our city. Without appropriate resources, our staff will remain overworked and the vital deep and broad community outreach necessary for education reform success will remain undone.

Mr. Chairman, I would be remiss if I did not mention that the Administration's budget does provide additional funding to the agency for equipment and machinery purchases, as well as funding for repair and maintenance of the agency's QuickBase data system. What these numbers do not tell you, however, is that the funding is inadequate to either upgrade or maintain the cost of the current QuickBase system utilized by the Ombudsman's office. We will continue to work with the Office of the Chief Technology Officer on the system and will keep you informed of our progress.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I want to be clear that the State Board of Education is unanimous in its support for education reform in the District. My colleagues and I were elected to get things done. We are asking the Council to help ensure we have the budget to do that.

I would welcome any questions you might have.

